

Islamic Art and Design: Meaning making through global connections

Sheyda Ardalan, Ed.D

Sheyda_ardalan@greenwich.k12.ct.us

<http://artofmiddleeast.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1385839211735486/>

Let's not beat around the bush and get to the point.

You cannot be afraid of Islam. There are 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. Only a very SMALL percentage of them commit acts of terrorism.

"Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims." - Brian Kilmeade, Fox News
Seriously? What about those who attack abortion clinics? When was the last time we heard the media refer to them as "Christian terrorists," even though these attacks occur at one of every five reproductive health-care facilities?

As an educator, you have an obligation to find the truth and teach it.

Muslims continue to bear the brunt of terrorism.

In cases where the religious affiliation of terrorism casualties could be determined, Muslims suffered between 82 and 97 percent of terrorism-related fatalities over the past five years.

- Report by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).

This presentation will cover the following:

- The misnomer of the term "Islamic Art"
- The World and Islam
- Brief introduction to Islam
- Art, Islam, and Influences
- Creating a Lesson

The Misnomer of Islamic Art:

The term *Islamic Art* has been used consistently to refer to non-religious art made by a vast group of people from very different cultural backgrounds throughout a great span of time. It generalizes the sophisticated art produced by these very different people. To use it is similar to categorizing art made from the birth of Christ to the present and covering all of Europe, North and South America, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia as Christian Art. This incorrect categorization does not serve the understanding of the material itself and their cultural and historical context. However, in this presentation, the term Islamic Art will be used for the sake of familiarity with the topic at hand.

Who Are the Muslims?

- The Muslim population is a diverse community of believers spanning the globe.
- Originally, all Muslims were Arabs.
- After Muhammad's death, Islam spread east, west, north, and south.
- Today, 25% of the world's population is Muslim (1.6 billion).
- Fewer than 15% of Muslims are Arabs.
- About 13% of Muslims live in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country, with a Muslim population of 203 million.
- Only 20% of Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa.

What Language to Muslims speak?

The Quran is written in Arabic and prayers are said in Arabic.

Languages of some non-Arab Muslims:

- Pakistanis: Language is Urdu
- Turks: Language is Turkish
- Iranians: Language is Persian
- Egyptians: Language is Arabic
- Afghanis: Language is Persian and Pashto
- Albanians: Language is Albanian
- Indonesians: Language is Indonesian

Not all Muslim countries use the Arabic Alphabet:

- Turkey: Latin alphabet; the spoken language is Turkish; religious writing is in Arabic
- Albania: Latin alphabet; the spoken language is Albanian; religious writing is in Arabic
- Iran: Arabic alphabet with added Persian ones, the spoken language is Persian
- Pakistan: Arabic alphabet; the spoken language is Urdu
- Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria: Arabic alphabet; the spoken language is Arabic
- Arab countries such as: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, United Arab Emirates: Arabic alphabet; the spoken language is Arabic

What is Islam?

- Islam is an Arab religion
- It started in Arabia in A.D. 613
- The founder was a 40 year old man named Muhammad
- At the time, most people in Arabia believed in many gods
- The angel Gabriel gave Muhammad the messages of God
- The Quran is the holy book of Muslims
- Muhammad:

*Preached in public about the evils of false gods
Followed the teachings of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus
Was concerned about the state of the poor and the oppressed
Taught that all people were equal in the name of God,
regardless of color, race, or rank*

What are the Practices of Islam?

Five Pillars of Islam

- Belief in one God
- Prayers 5 times a day
- Almsgiving
- Fasting during the month of Ramadan
- Pilgrimage to Mecca

Some Basic Facts: In Arabic

- *Allah* simply means *God*
- *Muslim* means *one who submits*
- Therefore Islam is *submission to the will of God*
- Muhammad was well known for his honesty as a young merchant
- Today, Arabia is known as Saudi Arabia

Sunni and Shi'a:

Disagree on the successor for Muhammad after his death

Sunnis, 85%

- Abu-Bakr
- Omar
- Osman (Usman)
- Ali

Shi'as, 15 %

- Ali
- Hassan
- Hussein
- 10 Descendants

Islam and Art:

Islam did not allow the representation of humans or animals in art made for religion.

This assured there would be no relapse into idol worshiping.

Throughout history, artists often disavowed this rule.

However, a strong nonfigurative tradition developed.

Line and Shape evolved in a very stylized and imaginative way.

Pre-Islam Art influenced the emergence of Islamic Art (generally, anything prior to AD 613 is considered pre-Islamic).

Ancient Stucco and Ancient Textile influenced

Islamic Stucco and Islamic Textile

Ancient Pottery influenced Islamic Pottery

Ancient Tiles influenced Islamic Tiles

Approaches to a Multicultural Lesson:

Level 1: The Contributions Approach

This approach reflects the least amount of involvement in multicultural education approaches.

This is incorporated by selecting books and activities that celebrate holidays, heroes, and special events from various cultures. For example, spending time reading about Dr. Martin Luther King in January is a common practice that falls into this category. In this approach, culturally diverse books and issues are not specified as part of the curriculum (Banks, 1999).

Discrete cultural elements are celebrated (heroes, food, holidays). The lowest form of a multicultural education; students are shown art objects from a given culture.

Level 2: The Additive Approach

Content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its basic structure. This involves incorporating literature by and about people from diverse cultures into the mainstream curriculum without changing the curriculum. For example, examining the perspective of a Native American about Thanksgiving would be adding cultural diversity to the traditional view of Thanksgiving. However, this approach does not necessarily transform thinking.

Introduction of cultural content and themes into the lesson without changing the structure of the lesson. Students copy art of a culture without any creative input of their own; they are taught to be "copiers".

Level 3: The Transformation Approach

This approach actually changes the structure of the curriculum and encourages students to view concepts, issues, themes, and problems from several ethnic perspectives and points of view. For example, a unit on Thanksgiving would become an entire unit exploring cultural conflict. This type of instruction involves critical thinking and involves a consideration of diversity as a basic premise.

Students view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of other cultures by changing the structure of the lesson. Students study the art of a culture and analyze, interpret, and respond to the works.

Level 4: The Social Action Approach

This approach combines the transformation approach with activities to strive for social change. Students are not only instructed to understand and question social issues, but to also do something important about it. For example, after participating in a unit about recent immigrants to North America, students may write letters to senators, Congress, and newspaper editors to express their opinions about new policies.

Students make decisions to create their art based on concepts and issues of another culture; their art will not necessarily resemble the art of that culture.

Reference: Banks, J.A. (1999). An Introduction to Multicultural Education (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Arts Instruction and Development:

Students grow and develop in predictable ways with wide variations within an age norm or phase. Student's capacity to make and understand art develop according to changes in the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical dimension of their lives. Instruction in the Arts must meet the needs of the students. Learning in the Arts should be sensitive to the changing needs, dispositions, and ways of thinking that students bring with them into the classrooms. Each classroom has its own unique characteristics based on the reaction of individuals to each other, the lesson, the material, and the teacher.

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

- Sensorimotor: Birth through ages 18-24 months
- Preoperational: Toddlerhood (18-24 months) through early childhood (age 7)
- Concrete Operational: Ages 7 to 12
- Formal Operational: Adolescence through adulthood

Phases of Artistic Development:

Victor Lowenfeld

2-4 years: Scribbling

4-7 years: Pre-Schematic

7-9 years: Schematic

9-11 years: Dawning Realism

11-13 years: The Age of Reason

14-17 years: The Period of Decision/Crisis

17 years & up: Adult

Judith M. Burton

2-4 years: Pre-Representational

4-7 years: First Visual Symbols

7-9 years: Visual Events

9-11 years: Representing Expertise

11-13 years: Ideas in Search of Forms

14-17 years: More Ideas in Search of Forms

17 years & up: Adult

Examples of Islamic Art Lessons:

Digital Middle Eastern Calligraphy

Teaching Objective: Students will learn that the expressive qualities of advanced computer art tools can be used distinctively to convey meaning based on the theme of Middle Eastern Calligraphy. Students will learn to reflect on their own and each other's work in a critique.

Mughal Manuscripts

Teaching Objective: Students will learn of the manuscript art of the Mughal Empire and through the manipulation of the liquid qualities of watercolor and ink (color mixing, line/shape making, dripping, bleeding, translucent overlaying) will learn that watercolor and ink can be combined in imaginative ways in a painting based on the theme of "a page from my life".

Momentary Aesthetics and Middle Eastern Calligraphy

Teaching Objective: Students will learn of the artistic traditions of Middle Eastern Calligraphy by exploring the relationships between the surface of the paper and lines created by exaggerated writing using their momentary sense of aesthetics.

Middle Eastern Calligraphy

Lesson Objective: Students will explore the relationships between the surface of the paper with lines and shapes by rendering the name of someone special to them in a lesson based on Middle Eastern Calligraphy. Students will learn that traditional art can be a springboard for the emergence of unconventional and contemporary art.

Lesson Procedure for a Calligraphy Lessons:

Introduce students to the world of Islam and its:

Diverse People, Culture, Environment, Basic Thoughts, General Art

Open up a conversation with your students about the art:

Why did the art evolve the way it did?

What conditions contributed to its emergence?

What are some of your thoughts about this art?

In what ways is the art different/similar to our art?

Show Students Examples of Arabic/Persian Alphabet and Calligraphy.

Calligraphy was used to honor a loved one's name.

To do so, artists would write down the name with utmost delicacy.

Special attention was given to formation of line and composition of the page.

Motivating Students:

Questions for students to contemplate:

- If you were going to beautify the name of someone you love and honor, for example: a pet, a friend, a relative, a band, a girlfriend/boyfriend, but you couldn't use images of animals or humans, what kind of an image could you make?
- What are some of the ways you might alter the surface of your paper to create your image?
- What things might you sacrifice in your art for the sake of beauty?
- How would you recreate that name on your paper to beautify it?
- What are some of the things you could do to make your lines and shapes interesting?

Evaluation Strategies:

Student performance is evaluated through the implementation of a series of formative and summative assessments such as:

1. Written Reflection
2. Review of Performance during Class
3. Portfolio Reviews
4. Individual Dialogue with Students
5. Oral Presentation/Reflection
6. Exhibition of Work
7. Rubric

An Honest Approach to Diversity through Art:

1. Diversity experience should not be confined to activities for special days and occasions, such as Martin Luther King's birthday or Cinco de Mayo.
2. Students need to understand how knowledge is constructed and ideas are formed within the culture studied, and how these reflect human interests, ideologies, and the experiences of the people who create them.
3. Once concepts are viewed from the perspective of another ethnic or cultural group, students can make decisions on their own art and formulate their own interpretations.
4. Once formulated, these interpretations should not be copies of art from other ethnic or cultural groups.
5. As in any developmentally appropriate lesson, these multicultural/diversity lessons should allow students to analyze novel situations, evaluate multiple perspectives, construct knowledge, and express their voice as they engage with materials.
6. Open up the capacity for your students to think and imagine through that culture.
7. Promote divergent thinking by teaching them to make sense of that culture and then construct their own understandings.

Things to Consider As a Teacher:

1. You must be highly adaptive.
2. Need to learn about the culture you want to introduce to students.
3. Be able to elicit relevant prior cultural knowledge.
4. Be attuned to both local and cultural contexts and experiences to make connections.
5. Open pursuing questions that arise from students' emergent understandings.
6. Don't be afraid to learn of, and from, very different cultures.
7. Start your multicultural lessons early (with young students).

The Lessons:

1. Lessons should be supportive, challenging, and developmentally appropriate.
2. Lessons must allow students to construct knowledge and express their voice as they engage with materials.
3. Lessons must be flexible and in relation to the circumstances that form the environment within which learning takes place.

The Diversity Experience in Art Education:

1. Education must begin with the proposition that all humans have contributed to world development and the flow of knowledge and information.
2. There is no support behind beliefs that a cultural conception can be too far removed from Western sentiment to have any significance.
3. A multicultural perspective invites and challenges students to encounter differing points of views.
4. Art from all cultures consist of patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting through images and symbols.
5. These patterned ideas and values have to be understood.
6. These ideas and values teach students different ways of perceiving, defining, and organizing knowledge of life experiences.
7. Students use these experiences of different cultures to engage in modern ideas that confront them in their contemporary life.
8. Through their own art making, students learn that differences point to similarities and that similarities come in many shapes.

Suggested readings and resources:

The Mediation of Ornament by Oleg Grabar

Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East by Venetia Porter

Shirin Neshat by Arthur C. Danto and Marina Abramovic

Islam by Eyewitness Books

Nuqteh, A new, easy, and effective method to learn Persian Calligraphy (Nastaliq) by Ali Rouhfar

Visit my blog and Facebook page for updated information and shared ideas:

<http://artofmiddleeast.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1385839211735486/>